

# N E W S R E L E A S E

News Release No.: 13-25

Date: May 16, 2013

## **Unemployment Insurance customer service center hours being cut** ***Serious federal underfunding leads to reductions in service hours***

SACRAMENTO – A \$158 million shortfall in federal funds over the next year is forcing the California Employment Development Department (EDD) to dramatically reduce hours that telephone service is available at already understaffed Unemployment Insurance (UI) customer service centers that handle customer questions and claims for benefits.

Starting May 20, 2013, EDD personnel will take calls from unemployed workers from 8 a.m. to 12 noon, Monday through Friday, except state holidays. The current telephone service hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. By directing all available staff to answer phone lines in the morning when the daily demand for telephone service is at its highest, the limited staff will be able to focus on other needs in the afternoon, like processing applications for benefits, answering online questions from claimants, and determining eligibility issues to help get benefits processed and paid.

"We are very concerned about the impact of the federal funding shortfall on our staffing levels and are working very hard to mitigate the effects on services," said EDD Director Pam Harris. "We urge our customers to use self-help options whenever possible so our limited staff can be available to help those with more complex needs."

The federal funding reductions total an estimated \$158 million in a combination of new sequestration spending cuts and existing administrative underfunding. Due to the funding shortage, the EDD is already down 900 staff in the UI program from recessionary levels through attrition. If nothing changes in the federal funding picture, the EDD will lose resources over the next 15 months for another 1,600 EDD employees that support the UI program.

While the state's unemployment rate and demand for unemployment benefits is declining from record high levels, demand still remains more than twice the pre-recession level. Yet federal funding for California's UI program has fallen well below the U.S. Department of Labor's own estimates of adequate funding.

(more)

California's underfunding works out to a reduction of 27%; that's above the nationwide underfunding level of 22%. And it's expected the federal government will continue to underfund state costs to administer the UI program, which will be compounded with the federal sequestration in the years ahead.

Under the new telephone service hours, when the phone lines are unavailable in the afternoon, unemployed workers can get information and assistance by using existing self-help options, in addition to a new UI Online option scheduled to launch this summer. UI Online will allow customers to view information specific to their claim, update certain information, change an appointment time, and reopen a claim without having to speak to an agent like they have had to do in the past. The new UI Online will also allow most claimants to certify for benefits every two weeks online or by phone using the automated EDD Tele-cert instead of mailing in their continued claim form, amounting to faster and more convenient service.

Here is a list of self-help alternatives available to claimants:

- [eApply4UI](#) to file a new claim or reopen a claim for benefits online.
- [EDD Web-Cert<sup>sm</sup>](#) and [EDD Tele-Cert<sup>sm</sup>](#) for certifying for their benefits every two weeks instead of relying on paper forms through the mail.
- The [EDD website](#) to find UI information such as expanded frequently asked questions, Tips of the Week, and Tip/Fact Sheets on key services.
- [EDD Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#) to receive up to date information. Claimants can also post questions on Facebook and access a series of How-To Videos on the [EDD YouTube channel](#).
- The [AskEDD](#) feature on the EDD website for submitting questions about a claim. Claimants will receive a confirmation that their question has been received and avoid the repeat dials of trying to reach a UI agent by phone.
- Computers available in [One-Stop Career Centers](#) throughout the state or in public libraries to access the [EDD website](#) and online services. Claimants can call the U.S. Department of Labor toll-free helpline at 1-877-US-2JOBS to find the One-Stop Career Center nearest them.

(more)

According to Focus Group research conducted in 2010, most people prefer accessing EDD information online, even those without home computers. Participants in the research considered online service more efficient and accurate. Most participants knew where they could get access to a computer and those who were not computer savvy said their children or other relatives can easily help them access information online.

In addition to making self-help tools available, the EDD is working to make the UI claims process easier and quicker for customers by simplifying forms and instructions.

# # #